

His Dark Materials

His Dark Materials is a trilogy of fantasy novels by Philip Pullman consisting of *Northern Lights* (1995; published as *The Golden Compass* in North America), *The Subtle Knife* (1997), and *The Amber Spyglass* (2000). It follows the coming of age of two children, Lyra Belacqua and Will Parry, as they wander through a series of parallel universes. The novels have won a number of awards, including the Carnegie Medal in 1995 for *Northern Lights* and the 2001 Whitbread Book of the Year for *The Amber Spyglass*. In 2003, the trilogy was ranked third on the BBC's The Big Read poll.^[1]

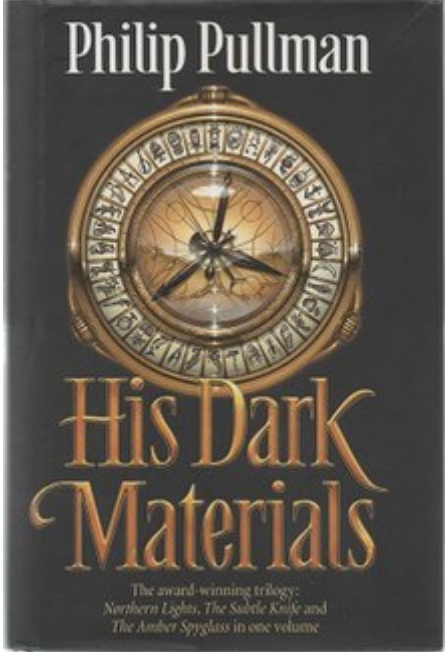
Although *His Dark Materials* has been marketed as young adult fiction, and the central characters are children, Pullman wrote with no target audience in mind. The fantasy elements include witches and armoured polar bears; the trilogy also alludes to concepts from physics, philosophy, and theology. It functions in part as a retelling and inversion of John Milton's epic *Paradise Lost*,^[2] with Pullman commending humanity for what Milton saw as its most tragic failing, original sin.^[3] The trilogy has attracted controversy for its criticism of religion.

The London Royal National Theatre staged a two-part adaptation of the trilogy in 2003–2004. New Line Cinema released a film adaptation of *Northern Lights*, *The Golden Compass*, in 2007. A HBO/BBC television series based on the novels commenced broadcast in November 2019.^{[4][5]}

Pullman followed the trilogy with three novellas set in the *Northern Lights* universe; *Lyra's Oxford* (2003), *Once Upon a Time in the North* (2008), and *Serpentine* (2020). *La Belle Sauvage*, the first book in a new trilogy titled *The Book of Dust*, was published on 19 October 2017; the second book of the new trilogy, *The Secret Commonwealth*, was published in October 2019. Both are set in the same universe as *Northern Lights*.

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His Dark Materials



Philip Pullman

His Dark Materials

The award-winning trilogy:
Northern Lights, The Subtle Knife and The Amber Spyglass in one volume

First combined edition (publ. Ted Smart, 2000)

Northern Lights

The Subtle Knife

The Amber Spyglass

Author	<u>Philip Pullman</u>
Country	<u>United Kingdom</u>
Language	<u>English</u>
Genre	<u>Fantasy novel</u>
Publisher	<u>Scholastic</u>
Published	<u>1995–2000</u>
Media type	<u>Print (hardback & paperback)</u>

Characters

Dæmons

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Awards and recognition

Controversies

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Related works

Lyra's Oxford

Once Upon a Time in the North

"The Collectors"

The Book of Dust

Serpentine

Adaptations

Radio

Theatre

Film

Television

Audiobooks

See also

References

Further reading

External links

Setting

The trilogy takes place across a multiverse, moving between many parallel worlds. In *Northern Lights*, the story takes place in a world with some similarities to our own: dress-style resembles that of the UK's Edwardian era; the technology does not include cars or fixed-wing aircraft, but zeppelins feature as a mode of transport.

The dominant religion has parallels with Christianity.^[6] The Church (governed by the "Magisterium", the same name as the authority of the Catholic Church) exerts a strong control over society and has some of the appearance and organisation of the Catholic Church, but one in which the centre of power had moved from Rome to Geneva, moved there by Pullman's fictional "Pope John Calvin" (Geneva was the home of the historical John Calvin).^[7]

In *The Subtle Knife*, the story moves between the world of the first novel, our own world, and another world, the city of Cittàgazze. In *The Amber Spyglass*, all those and several other parallel worlds appear.

Titles

The title of the series comes from 17th-century poet John Milton's *Paradise Lost*.^[8]

Into this wilde Abyss,
 The Womb of nature and perhaps her Grave,
 Of neither Sea, nor Shore, nor Air, nor Fire,
 But all these in their pregnant causes mixt
 Confus'dly, and which thus must ever fight,
 Unless th' Almighty Maker them ordain
His dark materials to create more Worlds,
 Into this wilde Abyss the warie fiend
 Stood on the brink of Hell and look'd a while,
 Pondering his Voyage; for no narrow frith
 He had to cross.

— *Paradise Lost*, Book 2, lines 910–920



Satan struggles through hell in a Gustave Doré illustration of *Paradise Lost*.

Pullman chose this particular phrase from Milton because it echoed the dark matter of astrophysics.^[9] In *The Subtle Knife*, the dark matter studied by physicists in a fictional version of "our world" is revealed to be the same thing as Dust, the mysterious substance central to the plot of the series.

Pullman earlier proposed to name the series *The Golden Compasses*, also a reference to *Paradise Lost*,^[10] where they denote God's circle-drawing instrument used to establish and set the bounds of all creation:

Then staid the fervid wheels, and in his hand
 He took the **golden compasses**, prepared
 In God's eternal store, to circumscribe
 This universe, and all created things:
 One foot he centred, and the other turned
 Round through the vast profundity obscure...

— *Paradise Lost*, Book 7, lines 224–229



God as architect, wielding the golden compasses, by William Blake (left) and Jesus as geometer in a 13th-century medieval illuminated manuscript.

Despite the confusion with the other common meaning of *compass* (the navigational instrument), *The Golden Compass* became the title of the American edition of *Northern Lights* (the book features an "alethiometer", a rare truth-telling device that one might describe as a "golden compass").

Plot

Northern Lights (or *The Golden Compass*)

In Jordan College, Oxford, 11-year-old Lyra Belacqua and her dæmon Pantalaimon witness the Master attempt to poison Lord Asriel, Lyra's rebellious and adventuring uncle. She warns Asriel, then spies on his lecture about Dust, mysterious elementary particles. Lyra's friend Roger is kidnapped by child abductors known as the "Gobblers." Lyra is adopted by a charming socialite, Mrs Coulter. The Master secretly entrusts Lyra with an alethiometer, a truth-telling device. Lyra discovers that Mrs Coulter is the leader of the

Gobblers, and that it is a project secretly funded by the Church. Lyra flees to the Gyptians, canal-faring nomads, whose children have also been abducted. They reveal to Lyra that Asriel and Mrs Coulter are actually her parents.

The Gyptians form an expedition to the Arctic with Lyra to rescue the children. Lyra recruits Iorek Byrnison, an armoured bear, and his human aeronaut friend, Lee Scoresby. She also learns that Lord Asriel has been exiled, guarded by the bears on Svalbard.

Near Bolvangar, the Gobbler research station, Lyra finds an abandoned child who has been cut from his dæmon; the Gobblers are experimenting on children by severing the bond between human and dæmon, a procedure called "intercision".

Lyra is captured and taken to Bolvangar, where she is reunited with Roger. Mrs Coulter tells Lyra that the intercision prevents the onset of troubling adult emotions. Lyra and the children are rescued by Scoresby, Iorek, the Gyptians, and Serafina Pekkala's flying witch clan. Lyra falls out of Scoresby's balloon and is taken by the panserbjørne to the castle of their usurping king, Iofur Raknison. She tricks Iofur into fighting Iorek, who arrives with the others to rescue Lyra. Iorek kills Iofur and takes his place as the rightful king.

Lyra, Iorek, and Roger travel to Svalbard, where Asriel has continued his Dust research in exile. He tells Lyra that the Church believes Dust is the basis of sin, and plans to visit the other universes and destroy its source. He severs Roger from his dæmon, killing him and releasing enough energy to create an opening to a parallel universe. Lyra resolves to stop Asriel and discover the source of Dust for herself.

The Subtle Knife

Lyra journeys through Asriel's opening between worlds to Cittàgazze, a city whose denizens discovered a way to travel between worlds. Cittàgazze's reckless use of the technology has released soul-eating Spectres, to which children are immune, rendering much of the world closed to transit by adults. Here Lyra meets and befriends Will Parry, a twelve-year-old boy from our world's Oxford. Will, who recently killed a man to protect his ailing mother, has stumbled into Cittàgazze in an effort to locate his long-lost father. Venturing into Will's (our) world, Lyra meets Dr. Mary Malone, a physicist who is researching dark matter, which is analogous to Dust in Lyra's world. Lyra encourages Dr. Malone to attempt to communicate with the particles, and when she does they tell her to travel into the Cittàgazze world. Lyra's alethiometer is stolen by Lord Boreal alias Sir Charles Latrom, an ally of Mrs Coulter who has found a way to Will's Oxford and established a home there.

Will becomes the bearer of the Subtle Knife, a tool forged three hundred years before by Cittàgazze's scientists from the same alloy used to make the guillotine in Bolvangar. One edge of the knife can divide subatomic particles and form subtle divisions in space, creating portals between worlds; the other edge easily cuts through any form of matter. Using the knife's portal-creating powers, Will and Lyra are able to retrieve her alethiometer from Latrom's mansion in Will's world.

Meanwhile, in Lyra's world, Lee Scoresby seeks out the Arctic explorer Stanislaus Grumman, who years before entered Lyra's world through a portal in Alaska. Scoresby finds him living as a shaman under the name Jopari and he turns out to be Will's father, John Parry. Parry insists on being taken through the opening into the Cittàgazze world in Scoresby's balloon, since he has foreseen that he should meet the wielder of the Subtle Knife there. In that world, Scoresby dies defending Parry from the forces of the Church, while Parry succeeds in reuniting with his son moments before being murdered by Jutta Kamainen, a witch whose love John had once rejected. After his father's death, Will discovers that Lyra has been kidnapped by Mrs Coulter, and he is approached by two angels requesting his aid.

The Amber Spyglass

At the beginning of *The Amber Spyglass* Lyra has been kidnapped by her mother, Mrs Coulter, an agent of the Magisterium who has learned of the prophecy identifying Lyra as the next Eve. A pair of angels, Balthamos and Baruch, tell Will that he must travel with them to give the Subtle Knife to Lyra's father, Lord Asriel, as a weapon against The Authority. Will ignores the angels; with the help of a local girl named Ama, the Bear King Iorek Byrnison, and Lord Asriel's Gallivespian spies, the Chevalier Tialys and the Lady Salmakia, he rescues Lyra from the cave where her mother has hidden her from the Magisterium, which has become determined to kill her before she yields to temptation and sin like the original Eve.

Will, Lyra, Tialys and Salmakia journey to the Land of the Dead, temporarily parting with their dæmons to release the ghosts from their captivity. Mary Malone, a scientist from Will's world interested in "shadows" (or Dust in Lyra's world), travels to a land populated by strange sentient creatures called Mulefa. There she comes to understand the true nature of Dust, which is both created by and nourishes life which has become self-aware. Lord Asriel and the reformed Mrs Coulter work to destroy the Authority's Regent Metatron. They succeed, but themselves suffer annihilation in the process by pulling Metatron into the abyss.

The Authority himself dies of his own frailty when Will and Lyra free him from the crystal prison wherein Metatron had trapped him, able to do so because an attack by cliff-ghasts kills or drives away the prison's protectors. When Will and Lyra emerge from the land of the dead, they find their dæmons.

The book ends with Will and Lyra falling in love but realising they cannot live together in the same world, because all windows – except one from the underworld to the world of the Mulefa – must be closed to prevent the loss of Dust, because with every window opening, a Spectre would be created and that means Will must never use the knife again. They must also be apart because both of them can only live full lives in their native worlds. During the return, Mary Malone learns how to see her own dæmon, who takes the form of a black Alpine chough. Lyra loses her ability to intuitively read the alethiometer and determines to learn how to use her conscious mind to achieve the same effect.

Characters

All humans in Lyra's world, including witches, have a dæmon. It is the physical manifestation of a person's 'inner being', soul or spirit. It takes the form of a creature (moth, bird, dog, monkey, snake, etc.) and is usually the opposite sex to its human counterpart. The dæmons of children have the ability to change form - from one creature to another - but towards the end of a child's puberty, their dæmon "settles" into a permanent form, which reflects the person's personality. When a person dies, the dæmon dies too. Armoured bears, cliff ghasts and other creatures do not have dæmons. An armoured bear's armour is his soul.

- Lyra Belacqua, a wild 12-year-old girl, has grown up in the fictional Jordan College, Oxford. She is skinny with dark blonde hair and blue eyes. She prides herself on her capacity for mischief, especially her ability to lie, earning her the epithet "Silvertongue" from Iorek Byrnison. Lyra has a natural ability to use the alethiometer, which is capable of answering any question when properly manipulated and read.
- Pantalaimon is Lyra's dæmon. Like all children's dæmons, he changes form from one creature to another frequently. When Lyra reaches puberty, he assumes the permanent form of a pine marten. Pantalaimon and Lyra follow her father, Lord Asriel, when he travels to the newly discovered world of Cittagazze, where Lyra meets Will.
- Will Parry, a sensible, morally conscious, assertive 12-year-old boy from our world. He becomes the bearer of the subtle knife. Will is independent and responsible for his age, having looked after his mentally ill mother for several years.

- Kirjava is Will's dæmon (named by Serafina Pekkala). She does not settle before the end of the story; but it is hinted that she will take the form of a cat.
- The Authority is the first angel to have emerged from Dust. He controls the Church, an oppressive religious institution. He told the later-arriving angels that he created them and the universe, but this is a lie. Although he is one of the two primary adversaries in the trilogy – Lord Asriel is his primary opponent – he remains in the background; he makes his only appearance late in *The Amber Spyglass*. The Authority has grown weak and transferred most of his powers to his regent, Metatron. He is extremely aged, fragile and naive.
- Lord Asriel, ostensibly Lyra's uncle, is later revealed to be her father. He opens a rift between the worlds in his pursuit of Dust. His dream of establishing a Republic of Heaven to rival the Authority's Kingdom leads him to use his power to raise a grand army from across the multiverse to rise up in rebellion against the forces of the Church.
- Marisa Coulter is the coldly beautiful, manipulative mother of Lyra and former lover of Lord Asriel. She serves the Church by kidnapping children for research into the nature of Dust, in the course of which she separates them from their dæmons - a procedure known as intercision. She has black hair, a slim build, and looks younger than she is. Initially hostile to Lyra, she realises that she loves her daughter and seeks to protect her from agents of the Church, who want to kill Lyra. Her dæmon is a golden monkey with a cruel streak.
- Metatron, Asriel's principal adversary, was a human, Enoch, in biblical times, but was later transfigured into an angel. The Authority has displayed his declining health by appointing Metatron his Regent. As Regent, Metatron has implanted the monotheistic religions across the universes. He becomes vulnerable to the seductive advances of Marisa Coulter, who betrays him by luring him into the underworld to his death. He is the series' main antagonist.
- Lord Carlo Boreal, or Sir Charles Latrom, CBE as he is known as in Will Parry's world, serves as a minor character in *Northern Lights*, but is a main antagonist in *The Subtle Knife*. He is an old Englishman, appearing to be in his sixties. He normally wears pale suits and is described as smelling sweetly. He is ultimately poisoned by Mrs Coulter, to whom he has previously been a lover.
- Mary Malone, is a physicist and former nun from Will's world. She meets Lyra during Lyra's first visit to Will's world. Lyra provides Mary with insight into the nature of Dust. Agents of the Church force Mary to flee to the world of the Mulefa. There she constructs the amber spyglass, which enables her to see the otherwise invisible Dust. Her purpose is to learn why Dust, which mulefa civilization depends on, is flowing out of the universe. Mary relates a story of a lost love to Will and Lyra, and later packs for them a lunch containing "little red fruits", which her computer, "the Cave," had instructed her to do.
- Iorek Byrnison is a massive armoured bear. An armoured bear's armour is his soul. Iorek's armour is stolen, so he becomes despondent. With Lyra's help he regains his armour, his dignity, and his kingship over the armoured bears. In gratitude, and impressed by her cunning, he dubs her "Lyra Silvertongue". A powerful warrior and armoursmith, Iorek repairs the Subtle Knife when it shatters. He later goes to war against The Authority and Metatron.
- Lee Scoresby, a rangy Texan, is a balloonist. He helps Lyra in an early quest to reach Asriel's residence in the North, and he later helps John Parry reunite with his son Will.
- Serafina Pekkala is the beautiful queen of a clan of Northern witches. Her snow-goose dæmon Kaisa, like all witches' dæmons, can travel much farther apart from her than the dæmons of humans, without feeling the pain of separation.
- The Master of Jordan heads Jordan College, part of Oxford University in Lyra's world. Helped by other Jordan College employees, he is raising the supposedly orphaned Lyra. Faced with difficult choices that only later become apparent, he tries unsuccessfully to poison Lord Asriel.
- Roger Parslow is the kitchen boy at Jordan College and Lyra's best friend.
- John Parry is Will's father. He is an explorer from our world who discovered a portal to Lyra's world and became the shaman known as Stanislaus Grumman or Jopari, a corruption of his

original name.

- The Four Gallivespians—Lord Roke, Madame Oxentiel, Chevalier Tialys and Lady Salmakia—are tiny people (a hand-span tall) with poisonous heel spurs.
- Ma Costa: A Gyptian woman whose son, Billy Costa is abducted by the "Gobblers". She rescues Lyra from Mrs Coulter and takes her to John Faa. We later discover that Ma Costa nursed Lyra when she was a baby.
- John Faa: The King of all the Gyptians. He journeys with Lyra to the North with his companion Farder Coram. Faa and Costa rescue Lyra when she runs away from Mrs Coulter. Then they take her to Iorek Byrnison.
- Father Gomez is a priest sent by the Church to assassinate Lyra. The angel Balthamos kills Gomez before he can reach her.
- Fra Pavel Rašek is a representative and alethiometrist of the Consistorial Court of Discipline. He is said to be a sluggish reader of the device, his dæmon is a frog.
- Balthamos is a rebel angel who, with his lover Baruch, join in Will's journey to find the captured Lyra. Near the end of the story, he saves both Lyra's and Will's lives by killing Father Gomez. Upon ensuring their safety, Balthamos calls out Baruch's name and dies.
- Tony Makarios is a naive boy who is lured into captivity by Mrs Coulter.
- Mulefa are four-legged wheeled animals; they have one leg in front, one in back, and one on each side. The "wheels" are huge, round, hard seed-pods from seed-pod trees; an axle-like claw at the end of each leg grips a seed-pod. The Mulefa society is primitive.

Dæmons

One distinctive aspect of Pullman's story is the presence of "dæmons" (pronounced "demon"). In the birth-universe of the story's protagonist Lyra Belacqua, a human individual's inner-self^[12] manifests itself throughout life as an animal-shaped "dæmon", that almost always stays near its human counterpart. During the childhood of its associated human, a dæmon can change its animal shape at will, but with the onset of adolescence it settles into a fixed, final animal form.

Influences

Pullman has identified three major literary influences on *His Dark Materials*: the essay *On the Marionette Theatre* by Heinrich von Kleist,^[13] the works of William Blake, and, most important, John Milton's Paradise Lost, from which the trilogy derives its title.^[14] In his introduction, he adapts a famous description of Milton by Blake to quip that he (Pullman) "is of the Devil's party and *does* know it".

Critics have compared the trilogy with *The Chronicles of Narnia*, by C. S. Lewis. Pullman however has characterised the *Narnia* series as "blatantly racist", "monumentally disparaging of women", "immoral", and "evil".^{[15][16]} The trilogy has also been compared with such fantasy books as *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson and *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle.^{[17][18]}



Leonardo da Vinci's *Lady with an Ermine* (1489–90), along with two portraits by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo and Hans Holbein the Younger, helped inspire Pullman's "dæmon" concept.^[11]

Awards and recognition

The first volume, *Northern Lights*, won the Carnegie Medal for children's fiction in the UK in 1995.^[19] In 2007, the judges of the CILIP Carnegie Medal for children's literature selected it as one of the ten most important children's novels of the previous 70 years. In June 2007 it was voted, in an online poll, as the best Carnegie Medal winner in the seventy-year history of the award, the Carnegie of Carnegies.^{[20][21]} *The Amber Spyglass* won the 2001 Whitbread Book of the Year award, the first time that such an award has been bestowed on a book from their "children's literature" category.^[22]

The trilogy came third in the 2003 BBC's *Big Read*, a national poll of viewers' favourite books, after *The Lord of the Rings* and *Pride and Prejudice*.^[1] At the time, only *His Dark Materials* and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* amongst the top five works lacked a screen adaptation (the film version of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, which came fifth, was released in 2005).

On 19 May 2005, Pullman attended the British Library in London to receive formal congratulations for his work from culture secretary Tessa Jowell "on behalf of the government".^[23] On 25 May 2005, Pullman received the Swedish government's Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award for children's and youth literature (sharing it with Japanese illustrator Ryōji Arai).^[24] Swedes regard this prize as second only to the Nobel Prize in Literature; it has a value of 5 million Swedish Kronor or approximately £385,000. In 2008, *The Observer* cites *Northern Lights* as one of the 100 best novels.^[25] *Time* magazine in the US included *Northern Lights* (*The Golden Compass*) in its list of the 100 Best Young-Adult Books of All Time.^[26] In November 2019, the BBC listed *His Dark Materials* on its list of the 100 most influential novels.^[27]

Controversies

His Dark Materials has occasioned controversy, primarily amongst some Christian groups.^{[28][29][30]}

Cynthia Grenier, in the *Catholic Culture*, said: "In the world of Pullman, God Himself (the Authority) is a merciless tyrant. His Church is an instrument of oppression, and true heroism consists of overthrowing both".^[31] William A. Donohue of the Catholic League has described Pullman's trilogy as "atheism for kids".^[32] Pullman said of Donohue's call for a boycott, "Why don't we trust readers? [...] Oh, it causes me to shake my head with sorrow that such nitwits could be loose in the world".^[33]

In a November 2002 interview, Pullman was asked to respond to the *Catholic Herald* calling his books "the stuff of nightmares" and "worthy of the bonfire". He replied: "My response to that was to ask the publishers to print it in the next book, which they did! I think it's comical, it's just laughable".^[34] The original remark in *Catholic Herald* (which was "there are numerous candidates that seem to me to be far more worthy of the bonfire than Harry Potter") was written in the context of parents in South Carolina pressing their Board of Education to ban the *Harry Potter* books.^[35]

Pullman expressed surprise over what he considered to be a relatively low level of criticism for *His Dark Materials* on religious grounds, saying "I've been surprised by how little criticism I've got. Harry Potter's been taking all the flak... Meanwhile, I've been flying under the radar, saying things that are far more



A traditional depiction of the Fall of Man Doctrine by Thomas Cole (*Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*, 1828). *His Dark Materials* presents the Fall as a positive act of maturation.

subversive than anything poor old Harry has said. My books are about killing God".^[36] Others support this interpretation, arguing that the series, while clearly anticlerical, is also anti-theological because the death of god is represented as a fundamentally unimportant question.^[37]

Pullman found support from some other Christians, most notably from Rowan Williams, the former archbishop of Canterbury (spiritual head of the Anglican Communion), who argued that Pullman's attacks focus on the constraints and dangers of dogmatism and the use of religion to oppress, not on Christianity itself.^[38] Williams also recommended the *His Dark Materials* series of books for inclusion and discussion in Religious Education classes, and stated that "To see large school-parties in the audience of the Pullman plays at the National Theatre is vastly encouraging".^[39] Pullman and Williams took part in a National Theatre platform debate a few days later to discuss myth, religious experience and its representation in the arts.^[40]

Terminology

Pullman renames various common objects or ideas of our world with archaic terms or new words of his own. Below are some of these renamings and new words.

- *Aërodock*: Airport. Airships are the dominant form of air travel in Lyra's world, which need to dock at a tower rather than on the land.
- *Æsahætr*: (literally "God-destroyer" in Old Norse) The formal name of the "Subtle Knife"; also deemed the "last knife of all".
- *Alethiometer*: A "truth teller", a rare device in Lyra's world which resembles a four-handed pocket watch, it can truthfully answer any possible question asked by a skilled user. From *aletheia* (Ancient Greek: ἀλήθεια), meaning 'Truth' and "métron" (Ancient Greek: μέτρον), meaning "measure".
- *Anbaric*, and the prefix *anbaro-*: Electric or electrical. From *anbar*, Arabic for amber; the English word "electric" is based on the Greek ἤλεκτρον (*élektron*), meaning "amber". Both words derive from the electrostatic properties of amber.
- *Atomcraft*: Research into particle physics, paralleling the German term *Atomkraft*.
- *Brantwijn*: Brandywine, similar to the Dutch *brandewijn*.
- *Byanroping* or *roping*: in the Gyptian dialect, a formal meeting of all Gyptian families to discuss important matters.
- *Cauchuc*: Rubber and possibly also plastic, from the Quechuan word *cauchuc* or *caoutchouc*, meaning the sap of the rubber tree.
- *Celestial geography*: Celestial navigation.
- *Chapel*: A scientific laboratory. All scientific enquiry derives from the church and so the language that describes it has religious overtones (a chapel is ordinarily a place of religious worship).
- *Chaplain*: The head of a scientific laboratory.
- *Chocolatl*: Chocolate. Sometimes hot chocolate; other times "a bar of chocolatl" (a chocolate bar). From *chocolatl*, the Nahuatl word for chocolate.
- *Chthonic Railway Station*: An underground railway station. "Chthonic" is from Greek χθόνιος (*chthonios*), meaning pertaining to the earth; earthy.
- *Cloud-pine*: A type of wood used by witches for flying (akin to broomsticks in other literature).
- *Coal-silk*: A synthetic fibre made from coal, was invented as a substitute for natural silk, akin to Nylon.
- *Coal spirit*: Petroleum or other hydrocarbon fuels derived from it.
- *Dæmon*: The animal embodiment of a human's inner-life. It is pronounced 'demon'.

- *Dust*: Mysterious cosmic particles that are integral to the plot. Dust is invisible to the human eye, and, unlike ordinary particles, Dust is conscious.
- *Experimental theology*: Science, especially Physics.
- *Electrum*: An occasionally used Latin word for amber; see "anbaric" above.
- *Fire-mine*: A geothermal vent in which the *panserbjorne* work in metallurgy; supposedly impenetrable to humans and witches.
- *Gyropter*: A helicopter, both words could be translated as "rotating wing" (Greek *gyros/helikos* + *pteron* = *circle/spiral* + *wing*).
- *Marchpane*: Marzipan, "marchpane" is an archaic word for "marzipan".
- *Naphtha*: Oil or petroleum (as in oil-lamp, rather than *naphtha-lamp*). A petrochemical like kerosene.
- *Night-ghast*: restless spirits, they are reminiscent of the spirits which - in some mythologies - were thought to be the cause of nightmares.
- *Oratory*: A church building.
- *Ordinator*: A computer (from the same root as *ordinateur* (French) and *ordenador* (Spanish)).
- *Philosophical*: Having to do with the study of the physical laws of the universe (i.e. what we would call physics). In our own world, science and physics grew out of - and were, until the 19th century usually referred to as - natural philosophy.
- *Photogram*: A photograph; more primitive than those in our world but able to be developed in various ways.^[41]
- *Poppy*: Opium. In Lyra's world opium use is quite legal and respectable. Oxford dons traditionally take it with wine after dinner.
- *Projecting lantern*: A magic lantern used for photograms. (Pullman noted in *Northern Lights's Lantern Slides* addendum that he based the projector in the book on one his grandfather owned.^[42])
- *Shadow* (capitalised): The name, in our universe, of Dust.
- *Smokeleaf*: Tobacco
- *(Experimental) Theologian*: A physicist. From "Natural Theology" meaning "science".
- *Tokay*: A highly prized wine in Lyra's world, the name is an archaic, Anglicised form of tokaji (a wine of the Tokaj-Hegyalja region in Hungary)^[43]

Pullman also uses archaic or adapted names for otherwise familiar peoples, regions and places.

Unless stated otherwise, these words are all capitalised.

- *Beringland*: Northwest America, specifically Alaska and the Yukon Territories of Canada. Named after the explorer who first set out in the region, Vitus Bering.
- *Brytain*: A phonetically identical re-spelling of Britain. It has echoes of "Brython", a word for ancient British people and the lands they inhabited.
- *byanplats* (lowercase): in the Gyptian dialect, the prominent area of raised land in the Fens.
- *Cathay*: China, taken from the medieval European name for China.
- *Corea*: A phonetically identical respelling of the country Korea (used both in Cittàgazze and Lyra's world). This is an old spelling, used prior to the current one, with a "K".
- *Eastern Anglia*: East Anglia, the region where John Faa's gyptians live; in Lyra's Brytain it has remained fenland with the Dutch influence remaining strong.
- *Eireland*: Ireland, as referred to in the Cittàgazze universe. A mixture of the Irish (Éire) and English name.
- *Fireland*: Iceland, named in the Peril of the Pole game in Once Upon a Time in the North. This name refers to Iceland's volcanoes rather than to its glaciers.

- *Gebraltarik*: Gibraltar, from its Arabic name Jabal Tāriq.
- *German Ocean*: The North Sea
- *Groenland*: Greenland
- *Gyptians*: A boat-dwelling, transient social group in Lyra's world. They live according to their own customs and traditions, outside mainstream society. They are reminiscent of "Gypsies" (Roma). Our word "Gypsy" is derived from the (*mistaken*) belief that Gypsies were Egyptian in origin.
- *Lake Enara*: Lake Inari, a lake in Northern Finland. From Enare, the Swedish-language name for the lake.
- *Lapland*: The region corresponding in our world to Swedish Lapland and Northern Norway.
- *Lascar*: An East Indian. This is an archaic, English word for a sailor or militiaman from the Indian subcontinent or thereabouts.
- *Mejico*: Mexico, from the Mexican pronunciation.
- *Muscovy* and *Muscovites*: A reference to the Grand Duchy of Moscow. Territory approximates to our Russia (see '*Russia*' below).
- *New Denmark*: A region occupied by the United States of America, west of New France. Lee Scoresby is described as a 'New Dane', specifically from the 'country of Texas' (see '*Texas*' below).
- *New France*: Includes the regions (in our world) of Quebec, much of eastern Canada, and the areas bought by the United States in the Louisiana Purchase. In the 17th and 18th century, the area around the St-Lawrence River and much of the North American Interior was called New France. Lee Scoresby recalls the Battle of the Alamo, in his world, as being between French and Danish settlers.^[44]
- *Nippon* and *Nipponese*: Japan and the Japanese language and/or people. From Nippon ("land of the rising sun"), a Japanese-language name for Japan.
- (*Great*) *North Ocean*: The North Atlantic Ocean combined with the European region of the Arctic Ocean.
- *Norroway*: Norway.^[45]
- *Nova Zembla*: Novaya Zemlya, a Russian archipelago in the Arctic
- *Panserbjørne* (generally italicized and lowercase): Armoured bears (as a whole race or as individuals); a warrior clan of sapient, talking polar bears based on the islands of Svalbard, known for crafting powerful armour from meteoric iron. The word "panserbjørne" literally means "armour-bears" in Danish. The singular is *panserbjørn*.
- *Peaceable Ocean*: The Pacific Ocean, calqued from the Latin.
- *Roman*: The Latin language.
- *Russia*: Mentioned in shipping entries at the end of Once Upon a Time in the North, and includes Finnish territory of the Russian Empire.^[46] As Muscovy is also mentioned on the same book page, 'Russia' might be separate from Muscovy.
- *Skræling*: An Inuit, particularly one from Greenland. Natives of Greenland were similarly named by the Viking settlers of our world.
- *Tartar*: A Tatar; Nomadic Turkic, warrior people of northern Asia, known for practising unusual spiritual rituals, including trepanning.
- *Texas*: The homeland of Lee Scoresby and a sovereign nation within the region called New Denmark. The Republic of Texas was briefly an independent nation in our own world.

Related works

The first of two short books, *Lyra's Oxford* takes place two years after the timeline of *The Amber Spyglass*. A witch who seeks revenge for her son's death in the war against the Authority draws Lyra, now 15, into a trap. Birds mysteriously rescue her and Pan, and she makes the acquaintance of an alchemist, formerly the witch's lover.

Once Upon a Time in the North

This novella serves as a prequel to *His Dark Materials* and focuses on the Texan aeronaut Lee Scoresby as a young man. After winning his hot-air balloon, Scoresby heads to the North, landing on the Arctic island Novy Odense, where he is pulled into a conflict between the oil tycoon Larsen Manganese, the corrupt mayoral candidate Ivan Poliakov, and his longtime enemy from the Dakota Country, Pierre McConville. The story tells of Lee and Iorek's first meeting and of how they overcame these enemies.^[47]

"The Collectors"

A short story originally released exclusively as an audiobook by [Audible](#) in December 2014, narrated by actor [Bill Nighy](#). The story refers to the early life of [Mrs Coulter](#) and is set in the [senior common room](#) of an Oxford college.^[48]

The Book of Dust

The Book of Dust is a second trilogy of novels set before, during and after *His Dark Materials*. The first book, *La Belle Sauvage*, was published on 19 October 2017.^[49] The second book, *The Secret Commonwealth*, was published on 3 October 2019.^[50]

Serpentine

A novella that was released in October 2020. Set after the events of *The Amber Spyglass* and before *The Secret Commonwealth*, Lyra and Pantalaimon journey back to the far North to meet with the Consul of Witches.^[51]

Adaptations

Radio

[BBC Radio 4](#) broadcast a [radio play adaptation](#) of *His Dark Materials* in 3 episodes, each lasting 2.5 hours. It was first broadcast in 2003, and re-broadcast in both 2008-9 and in 2017, and was released by the BBC on CD and cassette. Cast included [Terence Stamp](#) as [Lord Asriel](#) and [Lulu Popplewell](#) as Lyra.^[52]

Also in 2003 a radio dramatisation of *Northern Lights* was made by [RTÉ](#), (Irish public radio).^[53]

Theatre

[Nicholas Hytner](#) directed a theatrical version of the books as a two-part, six-hour performance for London's [Royal National Theatre](#) in December 2003, running until March 2004. It starred [Anna Maxwell-Martin](#) as Lyra, [Dominic Cooper](#) as Will, [Timothy Dalton](#) as Lord Asriel, [Patricia Hodge](#) as Mrs Coulter and [Niamh](#)

Cusack as Serafina Pekkala, with dæmon puppets designed by Michael Curry. The play was enormously successful and was revived (with a different cast and a revised script) for a second run between November 2004 and April 2005. It has since been staged by several other theatres in the UK and elsewhere.

A new production was staged at Birmingham Repertory Theatre (<http://www.birmingham-rep.co.uk/event/his-dark-materials-part-one>) in March and April 2009, directed by Rachel Kavanaugh and Sarah Esdaile and starring Amy McAllister as Lyra. This version toured the UK and included a performance in Pullman's hometown of Oxford. Pullman made a cameo appearance much to the delight of the audience and Oxford media. The production finished up at West Yorkshire Playhouse in June 2009.

Film

New Line Cinema released a film adaptation, titled *The Golden Compass*, on 7 December 2007. Directed by Chris Weitz, the production had a mixed reception, and though worldwide sales were strong, its U.S. earnings were not as high as the studio had hoped.^[54]

The filmmakers obscured the explicitly Biblical character of the Authority to avoid offending viewers. Weitz declared that he would not do the same for the planned sequels. "Whereas *The Golden Compass* had to be introduced to the public carefully", he said, "the religious themes in the second and third books can't be minimised without destroying the spirit of these books. ...I will not be involved with any 'watering down' of books two and three, since what I have been working towards the whole time in the first film is to be able to deliver on the second and third".^[55] In May 2006, Pullman said of a version of the script that "all the important scenes are there and will have their full value";^[56] in March 2008, he said of the finished film that "a lot of things about it were good.... Nothing can bring out all that's in the book. There are always compromises".^[57]

The Golden Compass film stars Dakota Blue Richards as Lyra, Nicole Kidman as Mrs Coulter, and Daniel Craig as Lord Asriel. Eva Green plays Serafina Pekkala, Ian McKellen voices Iorek Byrnison, and Freddie Highmore voices Pantalaimon. While Sam Elliott blamed the Catholic Church's opposition for forcing the cancellation of any adaptations of the rest of the trilogy, *The Guardian*'s film critic Stuart Heritage believed disappointing reviews may have been the real reason.^[58]

Television

In November 2015, the BBC announced that it had commissioned a television adaptation of *His Dark Materials*.^[59] The eight-part adaptation had a planned premiere date in 2017. In April 2017, writer Jack Thorne told the *Radio Times* that the series was still in pre-production. "It's at an exciting point where we're just ... trying to work out what works," and that he wanted to ensure that they were being loyal to the books.^[60] By July 2018, Dafne Keen had been provisionally cast as Lyra Belacqua, Ruth Wilson as Marisa Coulter, James McAvoy as Lord Asriel, Lin-Manuel Miranda as Lee Scoresby and Clarke Peters as the Master of Jordan College.^[61] The series received its premiere in London on 15 October 2019.^[61] Broadcast began on BBC One in the United Kingdom and in Ireland on 3 November and on HBO in the United States on 4 November 2019.^[62] In 2020 the second series of *His Dark Materials* began streaming on BBC One in the United Kingdom on 8 November and on HBO Max in the United States on 16 November.^[63]

Audiobooks

Random House produced unabridged audiobooks of each *His Dark Materials* novel, read by Pullman, with parts read by actors including Jo Wyatt, Steven Webb, Peter England, Stephen Thorne and Douglas Blackwell.^[64]

See also

- List of *His Dark Materials* characters
- Races and creatures in *His Dark Materials*
- Locations in *His Dark Materials*

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External links

- Philip Pullman (<http://www.philip-pullman.com/>)
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